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ABSTRACT

Knowledge about how language works is often considered superfluous by the public. In general, the public image of language is that language is in a serious decline and that outside influences on language have led it astray, views that are supported by false assumptions about language on the part of writers. Writers in newspapers and magazines note that language is declining, that accuracy of construction and expression have disappeared, and that television, Watergate and the rise of minorities have contributed to the downfall. The public does not seem to understand language structure and variability or bilingualism. There is a general belief that study of Latin is important to understanding English. Many writers desire an unchanging language style and standard, denying creativity and dialect variations. Bilingual education is criticized as detracting from a homogeneous society and catering to minorities and non-learners. Linguists may take advantage of the public discussion by: (1) presenting language variability as a resource rather than as a compensatory remedy; (2) dispel the myth that linguistics stands for a lawless body of materials and point out that linguists actually are proposing a more rigorous set of principles than ever before have been suggested; (3) expressing joy in language variation, and (4) examining both the good and the supposedly bad outside influences on language (CHK)

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Variability and the Public Image of Language

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Many years ago William James pointed out an important distinction between "knowledge-of" and "knowledge-about". He observed that every civilized language except English has two common words for knowledge. In French, for example, connaitre means knowledge-by-acquaintance, the sort of knowledge found in occupations or professions. On the other hand savoir is knowledge-about, the result of reflection, logic and abstract thinking. We generally consider knowledge-of as indispensable but we often regard knowledge-about as an unnecessary frill. Many practical citizens consider knowledge-about as actually in conflict with knowledge-of. Since linguistics exists primarily as a knowledge-about field (particularly knowledge about how language works) it has had relatively little impact on the business oriented, practical citizenry of this country. Under some circumstances, knowledge of language might be tolerated. Knowledge about it often appears to be a needless luxury.

It should not seem surprising that the public reaction toward language operates in cycles which reflect and parallel the social pressures of a given time. During the Kennedy administration when academic influence seems to have reached its summit, it is clear that even the field of linguistics was permitted to share in the dream of Plato's philosopher-statesman. Previous to that period, both language knowledge (connaitre) and linguistic knowledge (savoir) were summarily ignored by a public which was no more interested in learning language than it was in analyzing it. With the new Kennedy posture, all of academia thought of itself as the new aristocracy. The hard sciences became heavily funded, providing significant leaps in scientific discovery. The social sciences became influential far beyond their abilities, as Robert Nisbet observes,

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Robert Nisbet, "Knowledge dethroned," New York Times Magazine, Sept. 28, 1975, pp. 34-46.

misleading both themselves and the public into thinking that incontestable knowledge supported the decisions of the courts relating to the necessary conditions for learning in the schools, the effects of segregation on personality structure and many other expressions of moral principle and legal decision.

For an outstanding example of how dangerous the social sciences can be in such matters, we need look no further than to some of the issues involving our own field of linguistics.

The study of Vernacular Black English led many of us in the sixties to suggest hypotheses for dealing with the problems of Black children in America's classrooms. We argued that it was impossible to research how it is that Black children do not learn how to read, for example, and that the only reasonable way to demonstrate that language was a factor in this was to devise a set of controlled experiments with some classes using "dialect readers", some using "language experience methods," some using traditional basal readers, etc. This approach is all well and good, from the researcher's perspective. What linguists failed to account for is the public reaction to all this. For one thing, no matter how well motivated or academically sound the research may be, unless the public for whom the research is intended really understands it, the process is apt to founder. What the advocates of the dialect readers failed to take into account was the inability of Black parents and community leaders:

1. to distinguish between early learning skills and ultimate achievement;

2. to distinguish between the pedagogically (therefore neutral) rendition of VBE in print and the appearance of similar rendition in comic strips, dialect jokes or other at least potentially abusive print.

3. to appreciate research and development efforts which were done by scholars not from the target minority population.

That little was accomplished by the flurry of interest over dialect interference, at least directly, is now painfully obvious. It would seem that linguistics might have learned a lesson from it all: that variability in language is an extremely

complex phenomenon for laymen to understand. More recently, new areas of potential misunderstanding have reappeared. Once again the social sciences are acting as though incontestable knowledge exists to support court decisions. Now the issue is bilingual education. The Aspira Consent Decree, in New York City, recently required the city school system to test all children of Puerto Rican parentage, within a period of about six months, in both English and Spanish for their ability to "effectively participate in the classroom" by reading, writing, comprehending and speaking. To those unfamiliar with the state of the science of measurement in these areas, the task seemed reasonable. What the federal judge, the litigant's lawyers and even the school system failed to realize is the following:

1. The educational technology for assessing these abilities effectively does not exist. No definition has ever been given for "effective participation in the classroom".

2. The linguistic technology for assessing these abilities does not exist. No normed, cross-language instrumentation for K-12 students has been developed. What is worse, most language tests have proceeded as though it were obvious that the dimensions of measurement have been established and that the progressions of acquisition are known. It would seem obvious, however, that recent research on the pragmatics of language, or discourse, or language functions, etc., would more closely approach the questions of "effective participation in the classroom" than have our extant acquisition research on phonology or grammar. It would seem clear, for example, that a child who has mastered the ability to seek clarification from his teacher, has learned a language function far more critical for classroom survival than almost any imaginable phonological or grammatical interference factor. Because of some recent research in this area of linguistic variability, we now know some of the categories but the technology can tell us little about the way or rate they are acquired.

3. The political reality of assessing 300,000 Puerto Rican children with <u>any</u> kind of test, much less a good one, within the time constraints permitted,

was not recognized in New York City. As it turns out, a test of phonology and grammar was developed by school system psychometricians. It was administered by teachers, most of whom did not understand why they were giving it or what it was for. No controls were kept of the procedure and it is feared that some children were helped and others were handicapped. Nobody knows whether or not time limits were kept. To make matters worse, the teachers' union bitterly complained about this additional chore in an already busy teaching schedule. As a result, the scores of the tests are not regarded with confidence.

The point being made should be clear. Issues involving language are little understood by the lay public. Whether the focus is on dialect variability or code variability seems to matter little. Linguists have not assessed the knowledge base of their clients. No great problems will develop out of this failure as long as we work in social isolation but as we move into issues of public concern, it is imperative that we take great heed of the assumptions, values and beliefs of those to whom we are attempting to communicate. Otherwise, we can expect only to repeat this recent New York City experience.

One way to begin to assess the current public image of language is to heed the popular press. During the past year we have witnessed one best selling book on a layman's view of language, dozens of articles about language in our newspapers (with dozens more letters to editors about them), almost monthly articles about language in The Saturday Review and quarterly articles in Harpers and Atlantic. During recent months I have collected as many of such newspaper articles as I could find in the Washington Post, The Washington Star, The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, the Fresno Bee, The Charleston Daily Mail and the Akron Beacon Journal. In addition, I collected magazine articles from Time, Newsweek, Saturday Review, Atlantic and Harpers. One might argue that authors or writers' reflect a somewhat distorted view of American thought, but in many cases, my data also include letters to the editor, which reflect opinions little different from those of the authors.

In general, there are three categories of the public image of language:

1. the world is going to hell in a basket and language is leading the way;
2. evidences of outside interference on language which have led it astray;
3. evidences of false assumptions about language on the part of writers.

The remainder of this paper will deal with these three categories, citing

positive instances and noting how the study of variability in language will need to address these matters.

1. Hell-in-a-basket. Edwin Newman's book Strickly Speaking, elegantly portrays this position: "Language is in decline. Not only has eloquence departed but simple, direct speech as well, though pomposity and banality have not." (p. 4) Newman observes that obfuscation has always been with us but that today it is worse than ever:" . . . stiffness and bloat are almost everywhere." (p. 9). The reasons for this decline, according to Newman, are many. He blames rapid change (always dangerous), the rise of minorities (Blacks, Indians, Chicanos, women, homosexuals, lesbians, prison inmates, welfare recipients), the generation gap and television. Newman concludes his analysis with an observation that we have witnessed" . . . a wholesale breakdown in the enforcement of rules, and in the rules of language more than most." (p. 11)

According to Edwin M. Yoder, Jr., a syndicated columnist in the Washington Star, the discipline of language study has collapsed. (Star, September 18, 1975, p. 21) We can no longer decree shalts and shalt-nots with a straight face since the field has atrophied to the point of kittenish meaninglessness.

The recent fury over the declining scores on the Scholastic Aptitude test has brought out dozens more of opinions about the decline of language in this country. A Washington Star editorial (September 11, 1975) concludes, ". . . the written word has been in decline for some time." The S.A.T. scores have declined for twelve straight years largely a result of shifting societal values and the invention of television, which has turned "our minds into cucumbers."

A recent Time essay (Aug. 25, 1975) takes a slightly more careful position, noting that much of the current concern about language decline is little more than the pedants' delight in one-upping each others collection of absurdities and bloopers. Watergate has been the fairest game of all culminating, perhaps, with a book called The D. C. Dialect, with specific illustrated chapters on how to be impersonal, obscure, pompous, evasive, repetitious, awkward, incorrect,

faddish, serious and unintelligible. (Paul Morgan and Sue Scott, The D. C. Dialect N. Y. U. Press, 1975). The long and noble tradition preserved by English teachers, that of keeping a list of humorous student mistakes to be trotted out and chortled over, is renewed almost invariably in the letters to the editor columns following public essays such as the one in Time. One writer submitted his contribution, attributed to a police representative: "A number of shots was fired at the deceased person, mortally wounding him." Another submitted a letter written entirely in Latin. Despite Times' cautious warnings, however, the temptation to take the "hell-in-a-basket" position was too great to ignore. The article soon moves on to note that there are signs of ". . . a new brainlessness in public language that coincides with a frightening ineptitude for reading and writing among the young." (p. 34).

Thomas H. Middleton's column in Saturday Review also frequently supports the hell-in-a-basket position regarding language. On April 4, 1975, for example, his entire column was devoted to ya-know. Middleton, at least, writes wittily about it and with some insight into the fact that hesitation and continuation markers will probably always be with us, concluding: "And so it goes, forsooth, i'faith, bejabbers, alors, and there's nothing we can do about it." (p. 6). This statement may not rank as sophisticated support of linguistic variability and change, but it comes much closer than do most writers on this subject.

2. Outside bad influences on language. It is not unusual for the public press to, in effect, claim both that language is leading mankind down the path to destruction while also claiming that language is being done-in by various heinous bad influences of various sorts. Television is the most common culprit suggested and, although the tube has become fair game for almost all writers, criticism is nowhere more incisive than when it is written by TV critics themselves. Jean Stafford of the New York Times observes:

"The high linguistic crimes committed by television's newscasters have impoverished the richest language in the world. The crown jewels have been

smashed to smithereens and the gold settings have been hocked." (September 15, 1974, p. D23).

Other bad influences have also led language astray, according to the press. Time claims that Samuel Johnson's society pinned its faith on language while Americans attach theirs to technology: "It is not words that put men on the moon, that command Technology's powerful surprises. Man does not ascend to heaven by prayer, the aspiration of language, but by the complex rockets and computer codes of NASA." (Time, August 25, 1975, p. 34)

The Vietnam/Watergate morality muddle has also been suggested as a leading contender for the modern collapse of language clarity. Time continues, "An accumulation of lies inevitably corrupts the language in which lies are told." (Idem). "Bombing" became known as "air support" during that period, illustrating Times' contention that abuse of power is followed by abuse of language.

Other suggested bad influences include the feminist movement which, Time observes, "... may eventually succeed in neutralizing gender in language" (Ibid, p. 35), overworked teachers and open admission policies such as the one at a large midwestern university which conscientiously admitted 800 inner city Black students only to fail them after one or two terms of freshman English.

It is difficult to assess the output of the critics of language who feel that television, technology, slipping morality, feminism, overworked classroom teachers, the rise of minorities, or open admissions have caused a decline in language skills. One can only speculate that if this sudden flurry of interest in language had occurred in another age it might have been blamed on flouridation, jazz, the labor movement, industrialization, slavery or the invention of the printing press.

3. Evidence of false assumptions about language and linguistics. To be a linguist is to learn sooner or later that the lay public little understands language. Recent written public expressions about language certainly point this out. Particularly difficult concepts seem to be language structure, language

variability, (including language learning) and bilingualism.

Structure

In terms of language structure, English was said to be difficult, illogical, inprecise and unphonetic by Manuel de Manduley in a letter to the editor of the Washington Star (October 2, 1975, p. A14). The writer goes on to observe: "Except in the United States and places where dialects still exist, people try to speak as their language is written." On the other hand, in a Los Angeles Times front page article (August 7, 1975, pp. I, 20), Russian is compared favorably to English because it is "...more lexical, more synthetic, less given to rules."

Generations of teaching partial truths about English structure have produced a strong tradition of beliefs about Latin and its relationship to English. The Los Angeles Times (Dec. 12, 1973) reported a study done by ninth and tenth grade students at St. Paul's school in Garden City, New Jersey, who wrote letters to famous people asking whether or not they had ever studied Latin and, if so, what use it had been to their careers. Of all the letters printed in this column, the following are representative:

"Latin...disciplines and trains the mind . . . It helps to build a strong and, equally important, an exact vocabulary . . . It is my opinion that the study of Latin . . . can be a distinct advantage for a man who wants to comprehend his own language . . . " (Richard M. Nixon, p. 1-A, 6)

"In studying Latin, we learn about our own language and its heritage . . . As a result, we can more clearly understand ourselves and communicate with each other. I am sure you will agree this is an important step in promoting peace in our world." (Ronald Regan, idem).

"Latin definitely was an advantage to me in my study of the law as many Latin phrases are used in the Anglo-Saxon system of jurisprudence." (George Wallace, Idem).

"I did not study Latin in school except incidentally in connection with my study of the law." (Jacob K. Javits, p. 1-A, 7).

". . . I did study Latin. However, I am afraid I did not learn it, and it only helped me to get a degree." (Sam J. Ervin, Jr., Idem).

"I had five years of Latin and it was only of minimal importance in the law." (William O. Douglas, Idem).

It is not clear whether or not a larger study would have continued the trends noted in this research, but it is interesting to note that the three political conservatives felt that Latin was useful while the three liberals were unimpressed with its use.

Journalists seem to worry more about the ultimate disintegration of language structure from some previously assumed more perfect state. Earlier quotations from Edwin Newman and Edwin M. Yoder in this regard are backed up by Harry Reasoner's response to the question of the helpfulness of Latin:

"I'm strongly convinced that anyone who really uses the English language should also study Latin. I never really understood the structure of language until I studied Latin and I feel that it's ideal for that purpose." (Harry Reasoner, Idem).

Variability

Language variability has never been well understood by linguistic laymen, and the public press offers no counterevidence to this. There is a common thread of hunger and longing for an unchanging, unvarying prose style. Jean Stafford, the television writer for the New York Times laments that the American mind, like its writing style, has ". . . relaxed to the point of babbling (N. Y. Times, September 15, 1974, p. D23). She observes that the variability of language use in this country is a direct result of mental disorder, laziness and a stupified community brain. Her article, like many others, is articulate and clever, offering humorous and convincing evidence against variation by wrenching from sociolinguistic context. It does not occur to her that "diper" may be an appropriate pronunciation for her preferred, "diaper" in some places, by some people. It does not occur to her that to be hyperstandard may be worse than to be non-standard. It does not occur to her that all languages contain neologisms and that some of them become cannon while others do not. It does

not occur to her to distinguish between the creative use of language allowed to poets such as e.e. cummings ("anybody lived in a pretty how town") and the same sort of creativity she denied to non-poets such as advertisers (specifically, "you get a lot of dirt with kids; you get a lot of clean with Tide"). It does not occur to her that language use can be justifiably protective, as in mitigation (It is assumed to be acceptable to tell a terminal patient that his chances do not look good rather than to say, "you are going to die soon." On the other hand it is assumed to be bad for a Watergate defendent to try to protect himself by saying "The statement is no longer operative" rather than "this was a lie").

Variability of social dialect is even less understood by the non-linguist. The fact that linguists were studying vernacular Black English in the late sixties and early seventies was evidence enough for Bayard Rustin to comment in the New York Times that this activity was an "insidious conspiracy to cripple . . . children permanently (August 1, 1971, p. 7). Similar editorials have appeared in the Akron Beacon Journal (August 4, 1971, p. A 10) and in the Charleston Daily Mail (July 24, 1971, p. 4). The Akron editorial concluded that the concept of Black English perpetuates poverty since it prevents Black children from mastering the means of communication used by a highly educated population. The Charleston editorial argued that it was foolish for Brooklyn College to enroll "50 Negro students in a course in 'Black English,'" noting that the Ford Foundation will fund anything:

> Now, there is no such thing as 'Black English' just as there is no such thing as 'White English.' There is just English English. On this English English there are all sorts of picturesque, interesting and even charming variations - from the Maine twang to the southern dialect to the hillbilly drawl.
>
> Where these arise and persist, however, there is no need to teach them. They are learned readily enough by those who have had no opportunity to learn anything else.

As noted earlier in this paper, variability has had little sympathy from the public press. Occasional lip service is offered to certain quaint and picturesque regional dialects (usually with condescention) but no appreciation is shown for variation related to socio-economic class, academic discipline, sex, race or, for that matter, to style. Great delight is taken in bursting the bubbles of officialese for, after all, this makes for good audience reaction. Thus Time chides a policeman for saying "I apprehended the alleged perpetrato while speaking in Court while probably saying "I collared the creep" while talking in a bar (ibid, p. 350). But what could be more natural? Even funnier would be for the policeman to say "I apprehended the alleged perpetrator" while small talking in a bar.

What is essentially wrong with refraining from referring to mental hospit as "looney bins" and how different is this from the conscientious mitigation in prison jargon which refers to a solitary confinement area as an "adjustment center?"

Bilingualism

If variability in English were not enough of a problem for the public press variation across languages is even worse. The recent advent of bilingual education has brought forth a host of positions, almost all based on an imperfec understanding of the claims of bilingualism as well as the benefits. The California press has been more active than most in this regard, with editorials followed up by many letters to the editor. The Fresno Bee may serve as a classic example. An original editorial noted the flurry of bilingual education programs, lamented that so much time would be spent teaching Spanish and questioned why educational practice should cater to minorities (Fresno Bee, March 9, p. 6). This was followed by letters to the editor which managed to misunderstand the situation even more, showing concern that bilingual educatio would prevent ethnic minorities from melting into a homogeneous American society. Those who discussed bilingual education often did so with questionable

effectiveness such as the following:

". . . everyone who can't speak English is retarded in learning ability, and this is a good place for a bilingual teacher to remedy that learning handicap. (Common Sense, March 9, 1975).

"Being a native Californian of Mexican parents, our family (sic) also struggled . . . with our English at first, but let me tell you we learned our English well and now I'm happy to say we speak perfect English and Spanish . . . to heck with bilingual. If these people demand Spanish, let them learn it at home. School is for English . . . I know I'm going to be bombarded from all directions as anti-Mexican. Not true, I love Mexicans, some of my best friends are Mexicans (Petra Maria Cordova, March 9, 1975).

Suffice it to say that the public image of bilingual education has been that it is a financial drain on an already straining school budget, that it is a compensatory program for non-learners, that it is of questionnable Americanistic value and that it caters to the unreasonable demands of minorities.

What to Do?

From these evidences of the public understanding of language it seems clear that sociolinguists must address themselves to a different set of assumptions than those which our discipline might suggest.

There is probably no way for linguists to change the attitudes of the apparent millions of Americans who take solace from the notion that the world is going to hell in a basket. Such a feeling must be satisfying to many people, for whatever reasons. On the other hand, there is little to be gained by our permitting our specialty, language, to be thought of as an integral part of this disintegration. Rather than to become defensive about our field, however, I would suggest that we take this recent attention and turn it to our advantage. At least language is being discussed in the public press, whether intelligently or not. For a field which is as invisible to the public as language

to become visible, even if distorted, is an opportunity worth seizing. In the past, linguists have made only slight advances in seeing language from the public's perspective, a situation which has perpetuated the sort of misunderstandings noted in the preceeding press quotations. In an effort to seize the advantage of public attention and to head off future misunderstandings, the following four suggestions and strategies are offered. All of them are outgrowths of an understanding of the importance of variability in language and all reflect awareness of the sorts of viewpoints, research and analyses evident in effective sociolinguistics.

1. Linguistics must present language variability as a resource rather than as a compensatory remedy. As a field, we should guard against merely deflating the absurdities of those who little understand that language variation is positive rather than negative. This strategy has both passive and active implications. The passive implication is that we must learn to accept the beginning points' knowledge of the lay public as factual rather than to evaluate such a beginning point as naive. Linguists have been known to preach to educators that they must accept the child's language where they find it and build an effective learning program from that point. It is only fair that we also follow this principle, accepting lay judgements about language where they are and only then plotting a positive course to supplement or change those attitudes and that knowledge. The more active implication of this principle involves our studying variation in contexts other than those of minorities or aberrent groups. Many fields fall into the trap of studying primarily the aberrent groups (psychology and speech are clear cases). Linguists have also done this in the past, focussing on the vernacular variation among monority groups but seldom getting around to the study of Standard English. Thus we have learned a great deal about vernacular variation but very little about how it contrasts with non-vernacular speech. Today we know a good deal about vernacular Black English,

Appalachian English, and Chicano English but precious little about upper middle-class speech. To be sure, other speech communities have also been overlooked. A great deal has been said about mothers' speech but very little about that of fathers. Only very recently has any attention been given the question of what it is like to speak like a physician or a teacher or a lawyer.

Whether actively or passively, linguists will need to change the public metaphor of language, as it is now understood, away from that which is compensatory, something done to children who are needy, to a metaphor of resource, something to be grasped positively to further communication effectiveness in a variety of contexts.

2. In terms of structure, linguists will need to replace the impression that we stand for a kind of lawless, rule abandoning body of materials. Our linguistic forefathers, in their haste to show the inaccuracies of traditional grammars, presented the image that linguistics was against rules. This ultimately proved to be inaccurate for one of the most commonly held tennets about language today is that it is rule governed. It would do well, then, not only for linguists to dispell this myth but also to make use of it to explain that one problem with traditional rule statements is that they are not detailed enough and that language rules are far more complicated than we ever imagined. The recent study of variable rules, semantics and pragmatic meaning certainly provides grist for this mill. Instead of defending against the attack that linguistics has gone soft, the variationist is in a position to gain acceptability on the grounds that we, too, are against excessive looseness and that we are actually proposing a more rigorous set of principles than ever before have been suggested.

3. There is probably little that can be done about the delight which teachers and writers take in collecting linguistic bloopers and displaying them for humorous purposes. Almost everyone loves the ludicrous and it can be comforting to know that someone else murders the language even more than you do. However clever such examples can be, however, linguists probably could benefit from careful use of them, at least outside the confines of our own audiences. If we are to be helpful to non-linguists in any way, we will

probably need to improve the already sullied reputations which we have inherited from our predecessors. Perhaps Edwin Newman, Thomas Middleton, Jean Stafford and other journalists can get away with the crankiness which accompanies their articles. But linguists are not in such a favored position that their collection of bloopers or other vitriol will be appreciated, purchased or even read by the lay public. In a more positive and active vein, it should be possible for us to achieve the same level of reader appreciation by expressing the sheer joys of language variation as it is revealed to us in our data. If ever there existed a group of professionals who seem excited about their own field, it must be a group of linguists. What is urged here is that our delight in language variation, perhaps as it is revealed in child language or as it is expressed in a well turned phrase of poetry, be the equivalent replacement for the critical revelation of linguistic naivete which has so characterized our past. One of the greatest assets which has been opened up for scholarly examination by the study of variation is the simple joy of language. This is what our children seem to possess before it is systematically schooled out of them. Occasional glimpses of this joy can be found in some childrens' poems and stories, playground chants, verbal rituals, narratives and, perhaps less frequently, in written, adult literature. A useful strategy for linguists to develop would be one which the joy of language which we feel would be communicated to those who have not yet seen.

4. To those who feel that language is being led astray by television, technology, political morality, and minorities, we suggest a two-pronged strategy. It is always difficult to change a person's attitude while outwardly claiming to be changing his attitude. Language is unconscious and invisible enough to be useful as a tool for getting at attitude change. In Norfolk, for example, several linguists conducted language focussed teacher workshops which were actually aimed at racial attitudes. Language, in this case, happened to

form the substance for the examination of these attitudes. Variationists can study language as it is used for different purposes, legitimate or not, and in different ways by television. technology, politics and minorities. Variability exists in these settings as well as in others. If television has bad influences on language, it is equally likely to have good (or at least neutral) influences. If technology brings jargon, it can also be seen to bring accuracy, at least for the specialists who use it authentically. If politicians use language to lie, such lying should be defined and exposed but, as yet, truth value in language has not yet fully penetrated this field. On the other hand, the rights of politicians to mitigate or self-protect are no less than the similar rights of the rest of us. The real effect of the language variation used by minorities has not yet been fully examined, even by variationists. Few studies of the infiltration of language from speech community to speech community have been accomplished and little is known about the acquisition of acceptability, about linguistic favoring or about the nature or rate of loss of codes by individuals. The first prong of such a strategy, then, is to examine the supposed bad influences on language as they are seen by the public press and to ascertain which aspects if any, are actually bad and which aspects are actually beneficial.

A second prong of such a strategy is to identify and analyze clear instances of good influences on language. How stretched can syntax be before it stops bringing delight and starts offering interference? What effects on language does literature offer? What constitutes an effective language user? How does he acquire such effectiveness?

Again, it should be noted that the study variation provides the forum for building these strategies.

The plea of this paper can be characterized as one which urges scholars of linguistic variability to pay serious attention to the fact that we are in a period of language awareness. The attention currently being paid to language by the public press seems greater than we have had in decades. Linguists are urged to avoid being defensive and to worry less about being right than

than about learning from such public expressions. The strategies suggested here are positive and entrepreneureal, all seizing the opportunity of the current attention we are enjoying and building toward a time when the lay public will desire equally our knowledge-of and knowledge-about products.